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AN OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL STATISTICAL CAPACITY IN SELECTED ECA MEMBER STATES

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A. INTRODUCTION

1. At the Fifth session of the Joint Conference of African Planners, Statisticians and Demographers held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 21-28 March 1988, the ECA secretariat presented a document entitled "Data collection related to development programmes and aid flows: statistical deficiencies and recommendations" (E/ECA/PSD.5/13). The conference recommended to conduct country-by-country assessments of the state of national statistical services and to revise the document on the basis of the findings. It was further recommended that such national assessments should be a collaborative effort of the directors of national statistical services and ECA, and address issues such as terms of reference of statistical services structure, staffing, timeliness of publications, statistical deficiencies and material and technical assistance required (E/ECA/CM.14/19). Funding for carrying out the assessments was provided through the UNDP/IBRD/ECA project "Data collection related to development programmes and aid flows in Africa" RAF/86/058.

2. In undertaking the assessment exercise, thirty two countries were covered by ECA. These countries are: Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Togo, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

3. A questionnaire was prepared and sent to all forty five sub-saharan countries for completion. It included items on the institutional arrangements of the national statistical service (NSS), its organizational structure, staffing and budget. It further asked for the statistical production, outputs accomplished and modalities of dissemination, as well as data processing facilities and their capacity. In addition, countries were requested to state major problems affecting the performance of the national statistical service. Missions were undertaken to those countries which had agreed to participate in the assessment programme. The information from the questionnaire was discussed and complemented during the country missions. On this basis detailled reports of the statistical capacity of the countries covered were prepared.

4. This report presents a summary of the major problems on statistical capacity as observed in the thirty two countries, covering the institutional arrangements, statistical production, human resources, budget and technical assistance. Additional information from other ECA missions to these countries has also been utilized to supplement the individual country reports.

B. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

1. Organizational location of the National Statistical Office

5. It should be recalled that in document ECA/STAT/DM.5-STPA/87/7) presented to the Fifth Meeting of Directors of Centres participating in the Statistical Training Programme for Africa (STPA), most of the National Statistical Offices in Africa were under the authority of the Ministry of Planning. In this survey, out of 32 countries covered 17 (55 percent) are under the Ministry of Planning zhile 8 (25 percent) are attached to the Ministry of Finance and Planning. Ministry of Planning and Cooperation or Ministry of Planning and Transport. The remaining 7 (22 percent) of them are located in the Ministry of Finance and Economy (2 ministeries) or the Office of either the Prime Minister or the President (5 ministeries).

6. It should be noted that, in English-speaking countries, most of those statistical offices in the Ministry of Finance and Planning or in the office of either Prime Minister or President are still under the authority of planning directorate which is also located in the same office. In French-speaking countries, with a few exceptions, the "Direction de la Statistique" is directly under the authority of the Minister, Prime Minister or the President.

7. However, the location of the statistical office, although important, is not the dominant factor in determining the efficiency of the office. Rather, it is the quality of the leadership, especially its flexibility in iniating action, which is of greatest relevance.

2. Statistical Legislation and Co-ordination

8. All 32 countries covered in the survey have some kind of legislation relating to statistics. All of them have a law empowering the National Statistical Office to collect, analyse and disseminate statistical information. However, 20 countries have an act relating to the establishment of a National Statistical Office and 11 countries a body co-ordinating all statistical activities in the countries.

9. Statistical producer-user committees could be one of the major means for co-ordinating statistical activities and for disseminating statistical production. Out of the 32 countries, 11 (34 percent) have formal statistical producer-user committees. However, in the case of six out of these eleven, the committees are non operational. Informal statistical producer-user

committees are found in 10 countries (31 percent). The remaining 11 (34 percent) countries have no such arrangements. This implies that approximatively, one third of the countries run their National Statistical Offices without any form of co-ordination within their countries.

10. The absence of such legislqtion has weakened the role of the National Statistical Offices in controlling and co-ordinating statistical activities in the country. The co-ordination of such activities has depended heavily on the initiative of the national statistical office as well as the co-operation of the other statistical agencies within the countries.

11. The creation of informal producer-user committees has been one of the major means of co-ordination of statistical activities. However, this has been effective only when it is backed by high quality leadership and good management in the statistical system.

3. Organizational structure

12. A well-organized National Statistical Service is a perequisite for relevant, timely and high quality statistics. The organizational structure in many countries is based on a mixture of subject-matter and function. A few of them are completely centralized (5) while the majority have centrally-based national statistical office and other statistical agencies in other government ministries and departments and/or regional offices. There is no one country in the survey with a completely decentralized system.

13. In most cases, National Statistical Service as a regular data collection agency has transfered some of its activities to other statistical units created within other ministries and departments and also in the parastatal sector which is better suited for the purpose. Examples in this case, are statistical units in Education or Health ministries which have respectively responsibility of education and health statistics. Another clear example is the case where the Central Bank collects, compiles, and analyses all financial and balance of payments statistics.

14. One of the main reasons of this situation has been that NSS may not have the resources to meet the statistical demand of all the government ministries and departments. However, in all the countries they are ultimately responsible for major surveys and censuses, in particular population censuses, and in other fields if they are not involved directly, they are providing technical experties and other relevant advisory services. Whatever the case may be, NSS should play a co-ordinating role for all statistical activities if only, to avoid the duplication of activities.

C. STATISTICAL PRODUCTION

15. The main function of a National Statistical Service is that of statistical production. There is no single country in the survey that can claim to have a completely satisfactory system of statistical production. The main reasons behind this situation include, among other things, the absence of a work-programme, limited funds and the lack of equipment and of skilled and qualified personnel.

1. Data gaps

16. Many of the countries in the survey do not have any formalized programme of work. Only 14 countries (44 percent) were found to have a well documented work programme, especially those (8) participating in the African Household Survey Capability Programme (AHSCP). In the absence of a work programme, statistical priorities and performance are rather difficult to determine. This may be one of the major reasons for an often unbalanced statistical production: there is a heavy concentration on economic statistics followed by demographic statistics, then social statistics. There is hardly any effort to generate statistics on environment and energy partly because there are new areas of statistics.

17. In the field of economic statistics, most of the countries (17 or 53 percent) are experiencing severe data gaps in many areas. For example, in national accounts a number of countries do not have adequate break-down. The estimates are provided only at aggregate level. The same is true for agricultural, industrial and trade statistics if they exist at all. Similarly, up-to-date and detailed information is lacking on employment and price statistics. Major indicators on cost-of-living are provided either at aggregate level, or limited to the major urban areas only. The rural areas are not covered at all. In addition, major indicators are only available for the modern sector. the informal sector is not covered at all.

18. With regard to population and demographic statistics, it is encouraging to note that all the countries, except, one have undertaken either a population and housing census or a major demographic survey within the last ten years. In the absence of complete coverage of vital registration in most of the countries, such censuses and surveys are the major sources for estimating demographic indicators for national planning.

19. In 21 countries (65 percent) health and education statistics are far from adequate. Where they are available they are only given at aggregate level. In some cases, even break-down by gender is not available. The coverage does not even extend to the private sector while geographical coverage by urban/rural is not provided.

20. There is no doubt that part of the reason for these data gaps and this imbalance, is the absence of a statistical work programme as well as producer-user committees. There is also the fact that the NSS have continued to operate and function in the same way for a long time without taking new challenges and objectively looking at the current demands of statistical information; the statistics produced in NSS are producer-driven rather than user or demand-oriented.

21. Complaints have been voiced about the low priority given by NSS and the low budgetary provision resulting for this. One of the major reasons is also the absence of a work programme. One way of demonstrating to governments the effectiveness of the NSS is to present a work programme budget. It should be detailed enough to indicate the content and dates of planned outputs and the resources required to carry out the work; this allows the government to judge whether the funds required are justified.

22. It should further be noted that analytical capacity in most of NSS is lacking. This exercice has been left to either the academic institutions or international agencies. Detailed statistical analysis is usually not undertaken. The inter-relationships that may exist between various socio-economic indicators are not explored. Such an exercise would be very useful for data users in planning and decision-making.

2. Data processing

23. One of the major bottlenecks for generating timely statistical information is the inadequate endorsement with data processing capacity. The main reasons for this are inadequate hardware and related software, limited qualified staff and poor maintenance support.

24. One of the main issues is whether the NSS have their own data processing unit. Out of 32 countries, 24 (75 percent) of them have their own data processing centre. With regard to adequacy of computing hardware 19 (59 percent) are well-equipped while 5 of them are poorly equipped. On the issue of computer software 21 (66 percent) of 32 countries are equipped with adequate statistical and related software for data processing. Out of the remaining 11, 6 have limited software while the other 5 have serious problems.

25. As far as staffing is concerned only 11 countries have adequate and well-qualified data processing personnel. Ten of the countries are severely handicaped while the remaining 11 have qualified personnel for data processing work.

26. With regard to maintenance support, 18 countries have no problems with service and maintenance of the data processing equipment. Two countries reported very frequent break-downs while the other four faced frequent break-downs with limited maintenance support.

3. Data dissemination

27. Data dissemination through publications and other means is the main indicator of statistical output of the NSS. Data users judge the performance of a statistical office by the quality, timeliness and volume of the statistical information published. The release of such information depends on many factors including logistical and management support, data processing facilities and especially availability of printing facilities.

28. The presence of printing equipment within a statistical office facilitates speedy the printing of statistical output. Out of the 32 countries, 18 or 56 percent have in-house printing equipment. However, three of them were not operating due to lack of staff and other secondary supplies for printing. The remaining 14 countries relied either on the Central government printer or on private printers for the publication of their statistical output.

29. Due to the problems of printing facilities, a number of the national statistical offices have resorted to the provision of producing computer print-outs and diskettes to data users as a quick mean of disseminating staristical information. The number of countries currently doing this are 12 (38 percent) out of 32 covered in the survey. There are also 5 countries which conduct seminars/workshops to discuss the results of major censuses and surveys.

30. It should be noted that timely publication is known to be one of the means of judging the performance of a national statistical office. Some countries are still facing problems and produce their publications with a very serious time lag. Nine of the countries have their publications released with a time lag of more than 5 years. Most of the others produce their publications with a time lag ranging between one and four years.

31. The unavailability of printing facilities (equipment, staff...) in many of the NSS has created problems with the production of statistical publications. Part of the reason for the long delays in the release of publications is actually attributable to problems related to printing. The use of the government printer for statistical publication has not been very helpful. Resort to private printers has involved more funds and those resources are not readily available.

D. HUMAN RESOURCES

1. Staffing

32. All the countries (except one) covered in the survey have problems with regard to statistical personnel. 29 countries are faced with shortages of qualified professional staff. This shortage is particularly acute in data processing and specialised areas of statistics such as national accounts. A number of countries (24) also suffer from a lack of middle-level statistical personnel. In addition many countries do not have a programme of staff recruitment, development and training. Furthermore, because of poor conditions of service, a number of countries are faced with a serious problem of staff turnover, particularly at the professional level.

33. The inadequacy of professional staff in the statistical offices has resulted in (a) insufficient number of staff to adequately carry out the statistical programmes, (b) un imbalance of staff allocation among the various units; and (c) in some cases, too much reliance on expatriate advisors and international experts. All, excepr tive countries covered in the survey had unfilled posititions in the established posts both professional and middle levels.

35. The lack of professionals in specialized areas has jeopardised the statistical analytical capacity of many statistical offices. The problem could be partially alleviated by conducting in-house training for example in the use of micro-computers for the professional statisticians; this has worked well in a few countries where the micro-computers and related software are available.

36. The situation with regard to supporting staff is more satisfactory. Out of the 32 countries, 23 have adequate resources in this respect while the remaining 9 do not have enough supporting staff to carry out their statistical activities. The issue of supporting staff is linked to the problem of logistical as well as budgetary support. Countries

with poor logistical support for statistical activities, also have serious shortages of support staff. Likewise, countries which have experienced budgetary cuts have tended to reduce the number of supporting staff and rather retained the professional and middle-level cadres.

37. As noted earlier, poor conditions of service in some countries of the statistical offices have resulted in high turnover rates for the staff, particularly those at the professional level. Out of the 32 countries, five are experiencing very serious outflows of their trained staff, while eleven are facing a less severe problem. The remaining sixteen can be described as having no serious problems. However, it should be noted that because of the demand for data processing personnel in the countries, this is the area that is most affected. Professional staff are being hired to more lucrative jobs outside the civil service. The statistical offices, having invested in the training of these professionals, find themselves on the losing end.

2. Staff recruitment, Development and Training

38. It should be noted that the countries are having staffing problems partly because of the absence of a programme of staff recruitment, development and training. Usually professional staff are recruited directly after completing an university first degree or its equivalent in statistics or in related subjects. Some countries do not have facilities for professional level training in statistics. As a result, university graduates in other areas are recruited and are then provided with either on-the-job training or post-graduate training in the relevant areas of statistics.

39. It was also noted that in some countries where academic institutions provide professional level training, the fresh graduate can hardly cope with the type of work performed in the Statistical Offices. This has been related to the type of training offered at those institutions which is often regarded as too theoretical. Graduates had to be given some orientation and on-the-job training before they performed their statistical duties effectively.

40. Hardly any statistical offices reported a satisfactory situation regarding middle-level statistical staff. Again, the main problem has been that of training. Out of the 17 French-speaking countries covered by the survey, only 6 have training facilities for middle-level cadre and no one has conducted in-house training. As regard, the English-speaking countries, out of 15 countries, 11 are conducting some kind of on-the-job-training. It should be noted, however, that in a number of countries, middle-level personnel have been provided with further

additional training and up-graded to professional level. The turn-over rate of such professionals is very low. Most of them have tended to stay with the statistical office after attending professional level training.

41. Staff development programmes have usually been linked to schemes of service. It has already been noted that the conditions of service in many statistical offices are rather poor. This is demonstrated by the fact that 20 countries do not have a staff development programme. The remaining countries have a programme which do however function properly. The operational problems for some of those programmes are due partly to budgetary constraints or to poor management. Schemes of services in some countries are either out of date or not properly developed. As a result staff morale is rather low when it comes to being considered for advancement in the service.

3. Managerial capacity

42. The performance of the National Statistical Services depends to a large extent on the managerial capability of the offices themselves. Many of the countries covered in the survey are faced with problems of managerial capability. Fifteen out of the 32 countries have a statistical system that is well-managed. Then others have serious problems with the management of the National Statistical Service. The remaining 7 are facing one problem or another related directly to management.

43. In most cases the senior members of staff in the statistical offices have little or no experience at all in administration and management. As a result of this, the management of statistical programmes becomes rather poor. The image of the statistical offices, therefore is tarnished. There are some National Statistical Offices which are equiped with all the necessary resources and yet their statistical output is not satisfactory. Investigations have indicated that the major reasons for such a situation is poor management of such offices.

44. There are situations where the senior members of staff in the statistical offices have never been given a change to manage major statistical programmes or activities. Everything lies with the director of the statistical office. There does not exist a proper delegation of authority. In the absence of the director, everything, other than routine statistical activities, almost remains at a standstil. Such a situation has diminished the morale of the senior statistical professionals and even affected the performance of the whole office.

45. Some statistical offices have a system of convening regular meetings of all senior members of the office, where all matters relating to the statistical activities, their problems and progress, are discussed. This has helped a great deal in improving the confidence and managerial skills of the senior statistical professionals. At the same time, some countries conduct short-term courses in management and administration for all senior civil servants. The senior members of staff in the statistical offices are also considered and participate in such courses.

E. BUDGET

46. Any National Statistical Service without an adequate budget will face problems in performing its functions. A number of countries in the survey are faced with such a problem. Only 13 or 41 percent of them are allocated adequate funds from the government for their statistical activities. The remaining, 59 percent of them are not in a position to undertake all statistical functions because of budgetary constraints.

47. Government funds are allocated for personnel emoluments, logistical support, census and survey undertaking, procurement of equipment and training. Depending on the nature of the statistical activities such funds can be allocated under either recurrent or development/capital expenditure. Most of the countries covered have no unique problems with regard to the provision of funds for personnel emoluments. Any such problems are usually felt by all the government departments.

48. However, there are constraints with regard to the other areas of expenditure. On logistical support 14 (44 percent) of the countries do not have adequate logistical support for their statistical offices. In fact six of them are facing a critical problems in this area.

49. Similarly, a number of the statistical offices face problems with regard to funds for conducting censuses and surveys. Out of the 32 countries, 16 or 50 percent of them have budgetary constraints for conducting censuses and surveys. Many of these countries have relied on technical assistance for their major censuses and surveys.

50. The situation is the same with regard to funds for training and statistical manpower development. Nineteen (19) countries are not provided with funds for training purposes. They rely entirely on technical assistance for this purpose.

51. Most of the countries also face similar problems in relation to the provision of funds for the acquisition of equipment. The situation is particularly serious with data processing equipment. It was discovered that all existing micro-computers in most of the statistical offices were acquired through projects supported by technical assistance.

52. The budget allocated by the government to the statistical office has, in many occasions, not been adequate for carrying out all the statistical activities, for logistical support, survey and census undertaking, acquisition of equipment and training. The government would be in better position to assess the financial needs of a statistical office if a work programme is available.

53. In the absence of a work programme budget, it has been difficult to assess the effectiveness of the statistical services. It has not, for example, been possible to identify shortfalls in the statistical output that were a result of subsequent reductions from the approved budget. On the basis of a work programme budget, it would be possible for the statistical services to enumerate the final outputs in relation to the budget actually made available and therefore indicating the consequences of the budget reductions.

F. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

54. It should be noted that all the countries covered in the survey have received technical assistance of one form or another for the support of statistical activities. There are a few countries in which certain statistical projects cannot be undertaken without external funding support.

55. All the countries have received external assistance of some kind in order to carry out their major censuses and surveys. Support has been in the form of expatriate personnel, logistics, equipment and training. For example, there is no country which has undertaken a population and housing census without external support in at least one of these areas.

56. At the same time, there are a few countries whose statistical operations are still dependent on expatriate support. This is particularly so in the technical and specialized areas of statistics. Out of 32 countries, 23 (72 percent) are still dependent on expatriate personnel to perform some of the statistical duties. The main reason for this phenomenon is of course the inadequacy of locally qualified statistical personnel.

57. As far as general logistical support is concerned, half of the countries depend on external assistance for the smooth operation of the statistical activities. Again, this is because of limited funds from the government.

58. Technical assistance for training is provided in various forms. This can be in the form of fellowships for training within or outside the country or support for in-service training, or even support for workshops and seminars. All the countries have received external assistance for training fellowships, in particular for post-graduate training in technical and other specialized areas of statistics. A number of countries have also received technical support for in-service training. Out of the 32 countries, 12 or 38 per cent are still receiving this support. With regard to support for workshops and seminars, it should be noted that all the countries have benefited from such assistance.

59. It has already been noted earlier that most of the countries depend heavily on external assistance for the acquisition of equipment. There is no single country that has purchased all its entire equipment utilizing locally-provided funds. In some countries equipment like computer hardware has always been provided through technical assistance. It should be noted that the main reason for this has been the limited foreign exchange available in the countries. As a result, any statistical projects undertaken through external support has a component for the provision of equipment.

60. There is no question about the great role played by donor agencies and countries in the support of statistical activities in the African countries. This support has been in all areas including logistical support.

61. Training at all levels can hardly be undertaken without technical assistance. The situation is much more obvious with the provision of fellowships in technical and specialized areas of statistics.

62. The issue is what will happen when such technical assistance is no longer forthcoming. A number of the sttistical offices will have to cut down a number of their statistical activities. Some projects will have to be abandoned. Clearly this is not a healthy situation for the statistical services.

C. CONCLUSION

63. This paper has reviewed the various factors and problems affecting the performance of the National Statistical Services. It is clear from the assessments undertaken in the thirty two countries that there is no area which has no problem. It appears the problems run accross the board. African countries can no longer afford to neglect their statistical services and there is an urgent need for action to be taken jointly by the various actors (government national statistical services, users....) involved in the provision of good statistical services.